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ABSTRACT

Often students have the option to choose topics to write about during creative writing sessions. Increasingly, however, state mandated tests do not give students options of writing topics. The state mandated test specifies the topic. "Three B's and a C" is an integrated creative writing/social studies program that teaches students strategies for effective writing while at the same time reinforcing social studies concepts and vocabulary. The writing program has 15 generic activities that can be used during any social studies unit. When students have learned the process involved in each activity, they begin to become independent writers. The strategies are implemented easily in the regular classroom. The students enjoy using the strategies. (Ten figures are included.) (Author/RS)

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"3B's & a C": BUILDING BLOCKS FOR BETTER COMPOSITION is an exciting way to integrate creative writing and social studies. It involves many creative ways for teachers to reinforce social studies concepts and vocabulary while at the same time increasing the student's ability to write effectively on specified topics.

ABSTRACT: Often students have the option to chose topics to write about during creative writing. Increasingly, however, state mandated tests do not give students options of writing topics. The state mandated test specifies the topic. "Three B's and a C" is an integrated creative writing/social studies program which teaches students strategies for effective writing while at the same time reinforcing social studies concepts and vocabulary. The writing program has many generic activities which can be used during any social studies unit. When students have learned the process involved in each activity, they begin to become independent writers. The strategies are easily implemented in the regular classroom. The students enjoy using the strategies.

KEY WORDS: vocabulary, phrasing, brainstorming, integrated curriculum, creative writing, rhyming

THREE B's and a C (BUILDING BLOCKS FOR BETTER COMPOSITION) is one answer to the question of developing student writers who can write persuasively on a topic not of their own choosing. There are programs which allow student writers to chose topics of their own, notably "Writer's Workshop." However, state mandated testing programs, including the Maryland State Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP), do not give students options of topics to write about. Since these tests integrate writing, reading, and social studies or science, methodology needs to be developed which assists student writers to write effectively on topics for which they have no options. "Three B's and a C" is not a sequenced plan of study. It is a series of pre-writing activities which allow students to actively use social studies vocabulary and concepts. The activities remain the same throughout the year. The social studies units, of course, change. During the course of the year the students learn to use these activities independently. These activities become part of the students' repertoire of pre-writing activities. In this way, when students are expected to write effectively on a topic not of their own chosing, they can do so successfully.

In the course of using these activities, students are expected to think. Good thinking is the first prerequisite to effective writing. Hang a sign up in the front of the room that says: "Good thinking is good writing." Students complete the pre-writing activities to see how words from a particular social studies unit go together in many ways. Some of the

activities are better suited to some units of study than others. It is the teacher who decides which activity can be more effectively used than others. During the course of the year all activities will be introduced and modeled by the teacher and used by the students. It is important that students be encouraged to think and use the vocabulary creatively. There are no time lines about how long it takes to master each activity.

Each activity becomes a starting point for creative writing. Many of the activities are suitable for whole group, small group, or individual assignments. They make very creative seat-work assignments. Each activity's results can be kept in a writing folder which will be very useful to the student when composing a composition draft. I prefer to call the activities "word games". Students like to think of something called a game as not being work and the activities are usually fun, especially when completed in a small group atmosphere.

The activities are meant to be introduced during a social studies unit. As children develop greater understandings of the unit's information, pre-writing activities are also enabling them to see how vocabulary and concepts can work together.

It is important for the teacher to pre-plan the unit. You, the teacher, should have a good idea of the vocabulary

and concepts presented during a unit of study. If you encourage your students, they may be able to supply more words to add to those that you have thought of. Sharing your activities with other teachers multiplies the effect of "Three B's and a C". If each member of a team produces one integrated social studies/creative writing activity unit a year, the work of the individual teacher is lessened and more ideas become accessible. Teachers can piggy-back upon the ideas of their colleagues.

Find some place to save your graphic organizers. Since you will probably be teaching the same units next year, save this year's charts. Discussion of art work is essential to furthering vocabulary development. Even if the teacher is not an "artist", children can appreciate the attempt!

Many of the activities are open-ended. I try to set a definite number of examples so that students know when they have reached closure. Basic students may do five examples; while accelerated students may be challenged to do ten examples. Students should always know when they have finished the job. These activities can be adapted to higher grade levels by increasing the number of examples necessary for closure for each activity.

As part of your pre-planning, develop word lists and YOU begin to think of ways the words go together for different activities. You may find yourself enjoying completing the

activities along with your students! Save every idea. You may not be able to use a particular activity with this year's class, but next year's class may be more able to do each activity.

Using these activities develops vocabulary background. It is almost impossible for a student to say, "I don't know what to write about." Background knowledge builds self-confidence and the ability to manipulate words. Background knowledge involves thinking. Remember: good writing necessitates good thinking. These activities can be used as part of your science program, too. Creative writing knows no boundaries. I particularly like using these activities with social studies/geography units.

Try to find time for self-correcting. By sharing ideas and answers with each other, students also share their perspectives. Sharing develops increased listening and speaking skills. Sharing helps jell concepts and vocabulary because they are presented orally. Sometimes authors have to think out loud. Another corollary of writing is that good writing is "speech into print." Help children learn to talk through their writing and share ideas with others. Of course, it is necessary to remind children to keep their talking on the subject.

Each of the activities will be discussed with its creative writing/social studies outcomes. Each activity will

give several examples of how the skill is used. Remember, these activities are fun. I have included examples based on a unit of study about "desert regions." These activities will work with any unit of study.

ACTIVITY 1: BRAINSTORMING builds upon prior knowledge of the students. You can use brainstorming as a pre-test to determine knowledge children already have or a post-test. You can do brainstorming as a mid-point check-up during the unit of study. Brainstorming can be an individual assignment, a co-operative group activity, or a whole class activity with the teacher as the recorder. Children make a list of words pertaining to one topic. Give the children five minutes to write all the words they can about the topic. Definite time limits are necessary for closure. Tell them spelling does not count. You can determine which words to include as bonus spelling words based on need. Solicit words from individuals and write them on a large chart. Hang this chart in a prominent place in the room. Children will use this chart as a reference during later activities and for correct spelling during creative writing.

Examples: DESERT , hot, dry, date, oasis, camel, Sonora, Sahara, Gobi, nomad. Israel, kibbutz, oranges, irrigation, farm, sheep, herder, tent, gully, canyon, flash flood, cold.

Establish a routine as to how to brainstorm. Remind the

children that everyone contributes at least one word. Participation is necessary. Give a definite time period to complete the activity. Spot check each child's/group's work. This activity emphasizes the geographic themes of region and place.

ACTIVITY 2: PICTURE DICTIONARY can be created in several ways. Using a long roll of shelf paper, the children take turns writing a word from the unit and drawing a picture for the word. This "frieze" can be hung decoratively in the room for student use (See Figure 1.) Or, each child receives a 9x12 piece of paper with a word written on it. He/She draws a picture and depending on grade level, writes a sentence. The teacher calls out each letter, the children bring their pictures up. In this way alphabetical order is emphasized and the dictionary is collated in order (See Figure 2.) It is necessary to remind children that not every letter of the alphabet will be used. Sometimes unusual words can be used to complete the abc's. These words will not necessarily be remembered by all students. The example, "xeriscape", comes to mind. Geographic themes of place and region are emphasized. Or, staple newsprint together. The student chooses ten words from the brainstorming list and writes each on his/her newsprint book, one word to a page in alphabetical order. The student draws a picture for each and uses it in a

sentence. This is good seat-work (See Figure 3.)

ACTIVITY 3 BULLETIN BOARD AND DISCUSSION involves a small group of students working with the teacher to complete a bulletin board as a directed vocabulary building activity. This activity reinforces the geographic themes of region and place. Pass out pictures at random and ask children to describe picture and then hang on the bulletin board. Pictures from travel magazines or the "National Geographic" work especially well. Use pre-made labels to identify the major focus of each picture. This reinforces reading/writing vocabulary (See Figure 4.) Game: Divide the class into two teams. Call out a word. One person from each team races to the bulletin board to find each picture and read the label to the class.

ACTIVITY 4 CLASSIFICATION uses the brainstorming list. It reinforces the geographic theme of region. It reinforces the reading/writing skills of classifying, sorting, or grouping. The teacher supplies a classification worksheet if this is an individual seat-work or co-operative group activity. The teacher can direct this activity for small groups of students as necessary (See Figure 5.) Suggested categories which can be used for many units are: people, jobs, food, plants, land forms, water bodies, weather, animal, crop, foreign words,

transportation, noise, clothing, and product. Examples:

People: Arab, Nomad, Indian, tourist, Native American

Plant: cactus, date, orange, cotton, sagebrush

Weather: dry, arid, drought, cloudless, cold, hot

ACTIVITY 5 DESCRIBING WORDS teaches the writing skill of using adjectives and adverbs. I use "describing words" because sometimes the terms adjectives/adverbs becomes confusing. But you can teach the terms as part of your language arts program. The terms have more value when taught in a concrete context and as part of a real situation. Teaching terms in context makes them easier for students to understand. The important thing is that children use describing words. The teacher supplies a list of words. Children supply a describing word for each. This reinforces the geographic theme of place. Later, the children select their own list of nouns/verbs and write the describing words for each. With beginning students a supply of describing words either on the bottom of the sheet or on the blackboard will be helpful. Word banks help reduce the frustration for children having difficulty with this concept. Children should be saving each of these activities so that they can use them as references for future activities.

Examples: ___dry___ desert ___colorful___ canyon

___brown___ date ___sandy___ desert

THREE B'S AND A C: BUILDING BLOCKS FOR BETTER COMPOSITION

ACTIVITY 6 SOUNDS also reinforces the geographic themes of place and region. It reinforces the literary activity of writing words for sounds. This is usually thought of as onomatopoeia. It enriches the writing of children. Children think of a noise word for each vocabulary word.

Examples: wind ___howls___ pueblo ___creaks___

cactus ___creaks___ river ___roars___

This activity can be coupled with Activity 5 to produce a phrase of "describing word/noun/verb." This can be difficult as children are often repetitive in their choice of "noise" words.

Examples: dry desert moans colorful canyon echoes

brown date plops thorny cactus whistles

ACTIVITY 7 GROWING SENTENCES assists children in fleshing out their phrases into complete sentences. Use their results of activities five and six for this one. This is a good activity to reinforce the themes of region, place, and environment.

Examples: The dry desert moans sorrowfully.

Many thorny cactuses whistle softly.

Some dry dates plop onto the sandy soil.

ACTIVITY 8 REPITITION OF INITIAL SOUND help children listen to the flavor of the language. This is usually thought of as

alliteration. Children may choose any word from the chart and think of a describing word beginning with the same sound. Food words work well here. Children then draw a picture of their combination. These pictures are often humorous. This is another activity to reinforce the themes of region and place. EXAMPLES: desert dessert, colorful canyon, clumsy camel, sandy Sahara, snoring Sonora, temporary tent, pretty pueblo

You may try this activity using ending sounds to write rhyming pairs. Examples: glad nomad, bent tent, sloppy adobe, yellow pueblo

This activity can be further developed to make tongue twisters. Examples: sandy Sahara sands shift silently

pretty pink pueblos picture perfectly

ageless adobes attest to ancient abilities

ACTIVITY 9 MYSTERY MENU involves children in making up names for foods they would serve in a restaurant in the same locale as the unit being studied In this case it will be "Desert Sam's Desert Restaurant." Children write the menu, illustrate the food, and price the menu (See Figure 6.) Math games may be developed by introducing the children to selecting a meal from the menu. As a math activity it would integrate adding and subtracting dollars and cents with social studies. As a writing skill, it helps children create sensory images and

build vocabulary. As a geography activity, it reinforces the themes of environment, place, and region.

Examples: mesa muffins, canyon cantaloupe, cactus cannoli, pueblo pizza, Sahara spaghetti

Divide the children into small groups to design their own menu.

ACTIVITY 10: PLACE DEVELOPMENT ACROSTIC develops a sense of place which the student writer will put into one of his/her creative writing exercises. The child thinks of a word that begins with each letter of the place's name.

Example: S sandy
A arid
H hot
A Arabic
R rubble
A ageless

Magic word: Children discover the mystery location by solving the picture word clues. This can be done with characters, too (See Figure 7.) The magic word is the first letter of each word answer to the picture clues.

ACTIVITY 11: ABC GAME asks children to think of one word for each letter of the alphabet. This is a good small group activity. Remind the children that there will not always be a

word for each letter of the alphabet. Let them know in advance. This lessens frustration. This activity reinforces the geographic themes of place, movement, location, environment, and region (See Figure 8.)

ACTIVITY 12: WHERE AM I? makes children think of descriptions based upon their observations and perceptions about a particular place. Two lists can be generated. All of the five geographic themes can be integrated with this activity. Children can write the answer to their riddle on the back of the paper. Picture clues can substitute for word clues. This is a good starting point for writing descriptive paragraphs. It can also be used as a "Who am I?" activity.

Examples: OASIS

Observations	Perceptions
sparsely populated	lonely, barren, cold,
little vegetation	lifeless, dry,
trails, rocks	caravans, nomadic peoples

ACTIVITY 13: WORD SEARCH is easy to make if you use one half inch ruled graph paper. Then your lines stay straight. Use lower case letters since this is how children are taught to read. Many computer programs will make word searches and other word games for you. Unfortunately, some print in capital letters. Always use lower case letters. Keep the

words vertical and horizontal. Using words diagonally or backwards is extremely confusing for children (See Figure 9.) For primary age students it is helpful to include a word bank at the bottom of the page.

ACTIVITY 14: SEQUENCING: Things we do have a beginning and an end. Start with three steps: first, next, last. Then add a fourth step: first, next, then, last. You can use first, second, third, and fourth as well. Think of an activity presented in the unit with necessitates following directions to complete the activity. For deserts, the activity may be making an adobe brick. If you are really adventurous, model the activity for children so they get first hand experiences about completing the process in sequence. This activity works well with drawing sequence blocks for picture with lines underneath for explanations (See Figure 10.) The theme of movement works well with this activity.

ACTIVITY 15: STORY STARTERS are a kind of culminating activity. The preceding activities give the student a feel for the series of writing assignments he/she will be doing. Each child needs a writing folder in which to keep his/her pre-writing activities. This folder is invaluable. Artists have their sketch books; writers need their idea books, too. Each writing sample is considered finished when it is done.

THREE B'S AND A C: BUILDING BLOCKS FOR BETTER COMPOSITION

Polishing writing need not be done for all writing activities. However, finished works may be collated into a class anthology. You can photocopy the class anthology for whole class reading. You can put the activity on computer disk to print copies whenever you need them, too. Since the collected work pertains to a single topic is it a good concluding activity for the social studies unit. Children may copy their stories on chart paper to display in the hall. Calling attention to authorship is a great incentive for children to write.

Here are some story starter ideas: 1. Read a favorite story to the class. Children piggyback on the ideas in the text. 2. Use the picture dictionary and bulletin board your class has made. The individual pictures are good sources of writing ideas. 3. Assign a set number of words to be used in sentences by the students. Accelerated students will be responsible for writing more sentences. The assignment can be tailored to individual needs. If all the words in the word bank pertain to the same topic, the resultant paragraph will have a cohesiveness mere sentence writing would not achieve. It is a good idea for the teacher to model activities so that children become familiar with the format of the activity and get to see what a finished product looks like. 4. You can pose a series of questions to students. When the answers are written out in complete sentences, they form a coherent

paragraph which sticks to the topic.

CONCLUSIONS: "Three B's and a C" is a creative writing unit of study which allows students to make use of vocabulary and concepts presented in a social studies unit. These activities are generic in nature and open-ended. The purpose of the activities are to enable children to think, organize, and prepare themselves for a writing task. Given that testing programs are being introduced which force students to write about social studies topics not of the students' own choosing, students need preparation for effectively completing social studies/creative writing activities. integrating social studies with creative writing makes creative writing more fun for students and teachers alike.

FIGURE 1: PART OF AN ABC FRIEZE FOR DESERT REGIONS

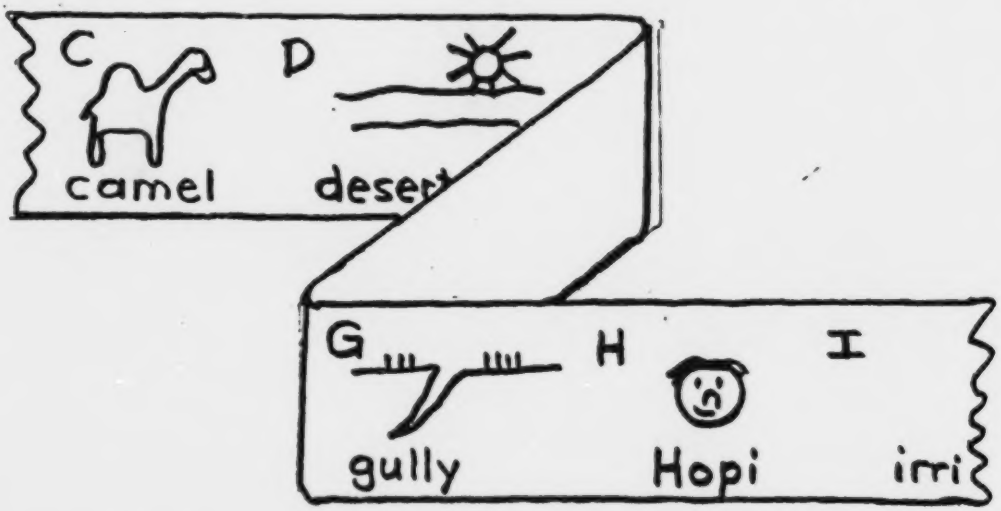


FIGURE 2: PAGES FROM CLASS DICTIONARY ON DESERTS

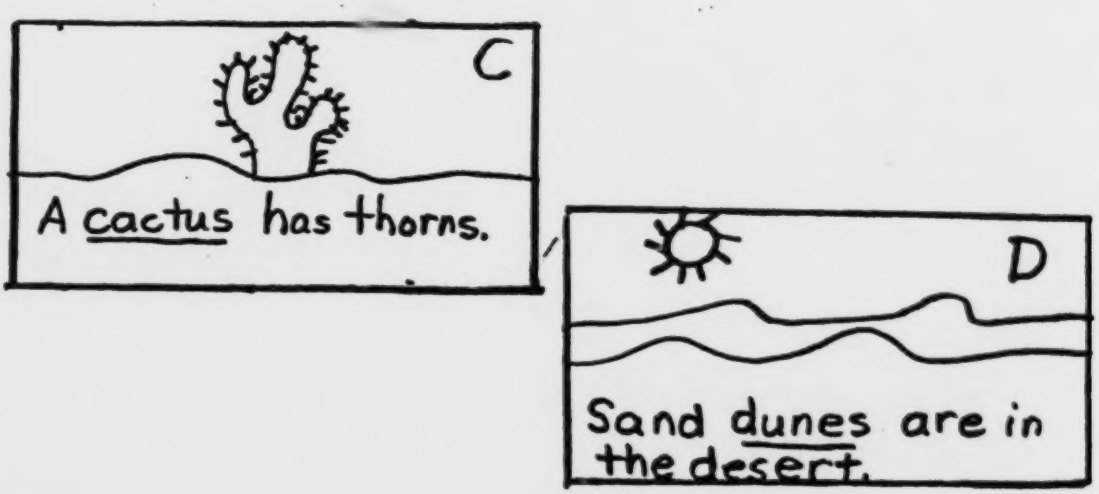


FIGURE 3: INDIVIDUAL ABC BOOK

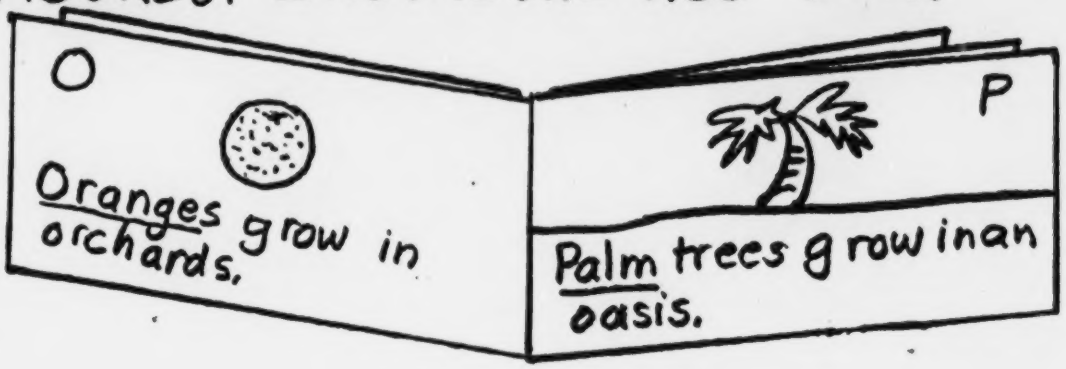


FIGURE 4: BULLETIN BOARD IDEAS

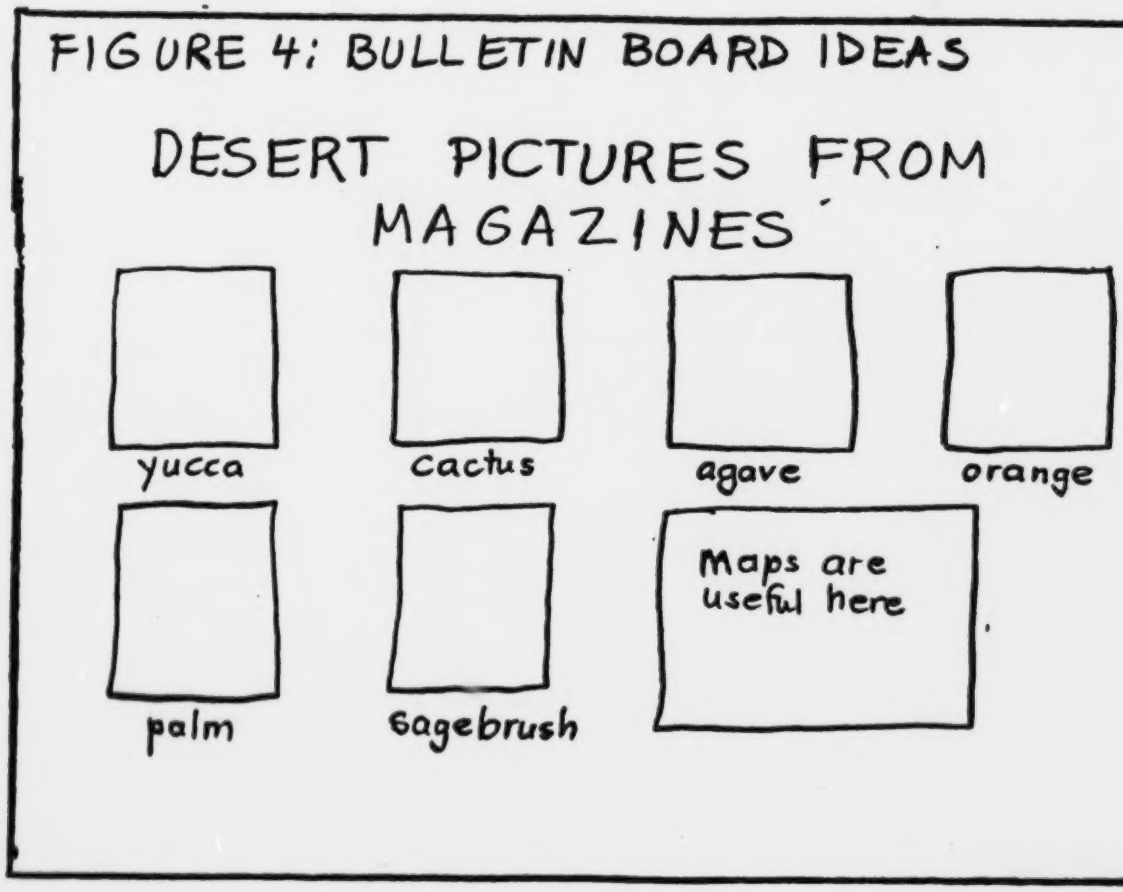


FIGURE 5: CLASSIFICATION

DESERTS

people	plants	landform	waterbody
Native Americans	yucca	canyon	river
Arabs	date	mesa	springs
Israelis	palm	butte	irrigation
Nomads	orange	gully	well
	sagebrush	mountain	
		sand dune	

FIGURE 6: MENU

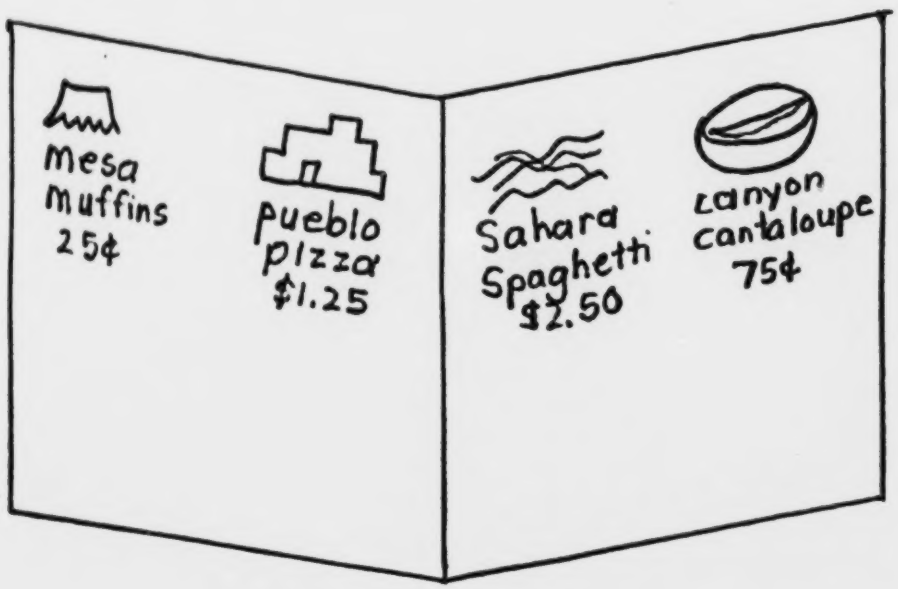
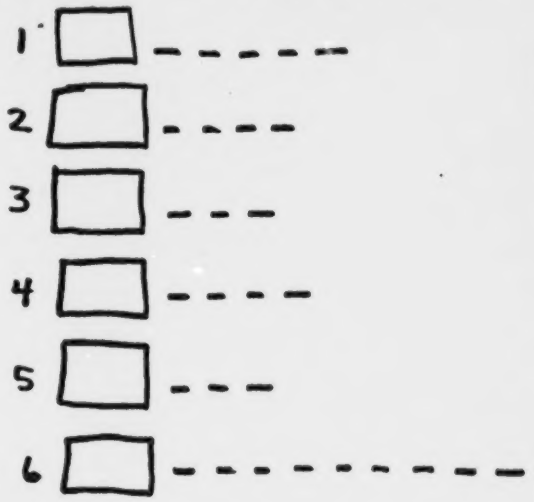
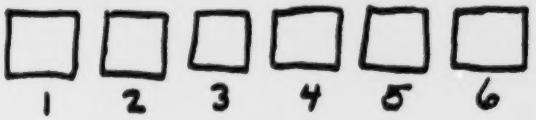


FIGURE 7: ACROSTIC



MAGIC WORD



WORD BANK

ostrich river arid
Negev Gobi eucalyptus

FIGURE 8: ABC's FOR DESERT REGIONS

A arid
B butte
C cactus
D date
E eucalyptus
F forage
G Gobi
H horse
I irrigate
J jewelry
K kibbutz
L lemon
M mesa
N Negev
O orange
P palm
Q
R river
S Sahara
T tent
U umbrella
V viaduct
W water
X xeriscape
Y yucca
Z Zuni

FIGURE 9: WORD SEARCH

d e s e r t w a b c
j o c q o r a n g e
k p a r s + t I d
n o m a d e u s e
l v e w a r a r f
m x l y t z b a g
n c d e e f g e h
k i b b u t z l i

- desert
- water
- camel
- nomad
- Israel
- date
- orange
- kibbutz

FIGURE 10: SEQUENCING

MAKING ADOBE BRICKS